10. SYSTEMS APPROACH TO DAY HOSPITALIZATION

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An understanding of the interrelationship between the goals and structure of psychiatric facilities is of importance in the development of effective treatment units. Theoretical constructs derived from systems theory can be of value in planning and utilizing treatment settings (Rice, 1964; Buckley, 1968; Von Bertalanffy, 1968). In this communication some of these concepts will be presented (e.g., primary task, the organization as an open system, boundary control) and then applied to problems typically encountered in designing one of the most frequently misunderstood treatment institutions, the day hospital.

PRIMARY TASK

While organizations may perform several tasks simultaneously and these tasks may lack a settled order of priority that persists over time, every organization has one task, a primary task, that it must perform in order to survive (Rice, 1968). A university, e.g. must educate, at least some of its students, a hospital must effectively treat some of its patients, an investor-owned corporation must make a profit, etc.

Day hospitals for persons suffering from psychiatric disorders have been established to pursue any one of the following primary tasks (Farndale, 1961; Kramer, 1962). They may provide: (1) an alternative to 24-hour inpatient hospitalization; (2) a transitional care setting whose task is to facilitate the reentry into the community of previously hospitalized patients; (3) a treatment and rehabilitative facility for the chronically mentally disturbed; and (4) a structure which delivers those psychiatric services which a specified community defines as an overriding public need. Other primary tasks may be approached through the development of appropriate day-hospital models. For example, day hospitals have been described as providing a training setting for a variety of mental health professionals and nonprofessionals. (Almond and Astrachan, 1969). We will not explore the complex interrelationships between service and training tasks in this paper.

Ideally, the structure of an organization is designed to support